China's Cyberspying Is 'on a Scale No One Imagined'–if You Pretend NSA Doesn't Exist

By Janine Jackson

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People used to joke that NSA stood for "No Such Agency"; a recent New York Times article was written as if mentioning it was still taboo.

Stories about cyberespionage–like the data theft at the US Office of Personal Management believed but not officially stated to have been carried out by China–are weird. For one thing, they include quotes about how "we need to be a bit more public" about our responses to cyberattacks–delivered from White House officials who speak only on condition of anonymity.

That's from a July 31 piece by the New York Times' David Sanger, which, as Marcy Wheeler of the blog Emptywheel (8/1/15) pointed out, had a certain amount of fiction mixed in with its reporting.

Sanger wrote that the administration concluded that the hacking attack was "so vast in scope and ambition that the usual practices for dealing with traditional espionage cases did not apply." He called it "espionage, on a scale that no one imagined before."

But how can that be? China is accused of obtaining personal information about 20 million Americans, federal employees and contractors, and that's a big deal. But the US's NSA, according to documents leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden, processes 20 *billion* phone calls and internet messages *every day*. The NSA's unofficial motto for years has been "Collect It All."

The article notes that the US has its own "intelligence operations inside China"—but pretends these are purely defensive, referring to "the placement of thousands of implants in Chinese computer networks to warn of impending attacks."

Sanger was one of the main journalists covering the joint US/Israeli cyberattack against Iran known as Stuxnet; one of his stories went out under the headline, "Obama Ordered Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran." But here, in this context, he writes, "The United States has been cautious about using cyberweapons or even discussing it."

No, no, they discuss them plenty, and use them too–some media have just decided that the public should only sometimes hear about it.

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